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Domestic Developments

[1](#)1. The ROKG yesterday appointed Wi Sung-lac, Special Assistant to
Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan, as new Chief Delegate to the
Six-Party Talks. (Chosun, Dong-a, Hankook, Hankyoreh, Segye, Seoul)
The new chief negotiator on the North Korean nuclear issue was
quoted as telling reporters yesterday: "If bilateral talks between
the U.S. and North Korea are helpful to the Six-Party Talks, they
can be viewed positively." (Dong-a, Hankook)

[1](#)2. The U.S.-led United Nations Command (UNC) and North Korea held
General-level military talks yesterday for the first time in more
than six years at the North's request. The talks, however, lasted
only about 30 minutes, because the North strongly demanded that the
joint ROK-U.S. military drill, slated for March 9-20, be scrapped,
with the UNC reaffirming that the annual drill is only a
"defense-oriented exercise." (All)

¶3. The North's rare request for talks with the UNC might have been intended to build justification for provocations, including a missile launch, while isolating the ROK in discussing political and military affairs. (Hankook, Segye, KBS, MBC)

¶4. The ROK and the U.S. held a Security Policy Initiative (SPI) meeting in Seoul yesterday, a regular working-level gathering on bilateral security issues, to discuss pending issues, such as the transfer of wartime operational control of ROK troops from the U.S. to the ROK and the relocation of USFK bases. The two sides agreed to enhance their cooperation and information sharing on North Korea's missile activities. (Hankook)

Media Analysis

North Korea

Yesterday's General-level military talks between the U.S.-led United Nations Command (UNC) and North Korea received wide play. The ROK media reported that the talks, held for the first time in more than six years at the North's request, lasted only about 30 minutes, because the communist state strongly demanded that the joint ROK-U.S. military drill, slated for March 9-20, be scrapped, with the UNC reaffirming that the annual drill is only a "defense-oriented exercise." Most of the ROK media viewed the fact that North Korea requested the talks with the UNC as part of its long-standing tactic to isolate the ROK in discussing political and military affairs. Moderate Hankook Ilbo, in particular, saw the North Korean move as intended to build justification for provocations, including a missile launch.

Adm. Mike Mullen, Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, was quoted by moderate Hankook Ilbo and conservative Segye Ilbo as saying during a March 1 interview with CNN: "The U.S. is watching North Korea even more closely these days because of reports that North Korea plans to test-fire a long-range missile."

Most of the ROK media reported on yesterday's appointment of Wi Sung-lac, Special Assistant to Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan, as new Chief Delegate to the Six-Party Talks. The new chief negotiator on the North Korean nuclear issue was quoted as telling reporters yesterday: "If bilateral talks between the U.S. and North Korea are helpful to the Six-Party Talks, they can be viewed positively."

Opinions/Editorials

What Obama's Reforms Suggest to Us
(Hankook Ilbo, March 3, 2009, Page 39)

U.S. President Obama's reform policies have been revealed. He emphasized that he will enhance welfare through massive government spending, reduce income inequality and drive the growth engine through more investment on energy, education and medical care. He also said that he will implement medical insurance for all Americans, and eliminate tax benefits for the rich and large corporations. He stressed remodeling American society by uniting Americans through a reduction in the budget deficit and redistribution of wealth.

A tax increase for the rich is the most controversial idea in Obamanomics. President Obama plans to increase the income tax rate for high income earners and the dividend tax rate for large corporations in order to collect 1 trillion dollars over the next 10 years. This money will go towards establishing medical insurance for all Americans. Professor Paul Krugman at Princeton University said, "Since the 1980s, the U.S. has seen income inequality worsening due to tax reduction for the wealthy and 40% of the population has not been covered by medical insurance." Krugman's emphasis on the need for scrapping tax benefits for the wealthy and expanding the social safety net seems to uphold Obama's reform initiatives.

Obama's reforms are significant in that he officially abolished 'small government' and 'tax cuts' put in place by the Reagan Administration 30 years ago. He intends to remedy hazards of neoliberalism by reverting to a tax increase and big government to overcome the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

Obama said that he is ready to battle with America's interest groups. The Democratic Party is rooting for him, saying that Obama has embarked on bold and realistic reforms. Meanwhile, the Republican Party argues that "Obama is waging a class war."

It will not be easy for Obama's reform bills to pass Congress due to severe opposition from the Republican Party. But he reminds us that in times of crisis, it is important to resolve social and economic inequality by focusing on distribution of wealth and welfare instead of pushing for growth-oriented policy and tax cuts. What matters in times of hardship, is that the government acts to reduce inequality and tries to rebuild the lives of the lower-and middle classes.

Features

[UN. Korea, UN Command Hold 1st Talks in 6 Years](#)
(Dong-a Ilbo, March 3, 2009, Page 6)

North Korea yesterday criticized a South Korea-U.S. joint drill in its first talks with the United Nations Command in more than six years.

A military source said North Korean generals strongly requested the U.N. Command stop the military exercise, "Key Resolve", in the 15th round of high-level talks in the border village of Panmunjom.

"In the 30-minute talks, the North said the joint military exercise is increasing tension on the Korean Peninsula, and mentioned the schedule of Key Resolve and the current movement of the U.S. military on the peninsula," the source said. The U.N. Command rejected the request, saying Key Resolve is an annual defense drill and that it sent the specific training schedule to the North on Feb. 18.

In a phone message sent to the U.N. Command on Saturday, Pyongyang said Washington is committing a provocation in the border buffer zone with the tacit agreement of South Korea. The North also said that it proposed the talks to discuss easing tension on the peninsula with the U.N. Command.

U.S. Air Force Major Gen. Johnny Weida, Deputy Chief of Staff for the U.N. Command, and the North's Lt. Gen. Ri Chan Bok attended the talks as the chief delegates of their respective sides.

* This is a translation provided by the newspaper, and it is identical to the Korean version.

"The U.S.-North Korea Talks Can Be Viewed Positively If They Are Helpful To the Six-Party Talks"
(Hankook Ilbo, March 3, 2009, Page 5)

By Reporter Chung Sang-won

The ROKG yesterday appointed Wi Sung-lac, Special Assistant to Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan, as Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs of the ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and new Chief Delegate to the Six-Party Talks.

New chief delegate Wi is a diplomat versed in ROK-U.S. relations and the North Korean nuclear issue. He served as Director General of the North American Affairs Bureau and Political Minister at the South Korean Embassy in Washington, and also has held major positions relating to ROK-U.S. relations. He was deeply involved in the negotiations after the second North Korean nuclear crisis that erupted in October 2002.

He served as Deputy Head of the ROK Delegation to the Six-Party Talks aimed at addressing the first North Korean nuclear crisis that occurred in August 2003. In 2004, he served as an advisor for the delegations to the second and third rounds of the Six-Party Talks. He has plenty of experience in negotiations on the North Korean nuclear issue.

He said to reporters, "We should share the urgency of the situation, given that four years have passed since the North's nuclear test." He added, "I think that the North Korean nuclear issue can be

resolved through negotiations."

He also noted, "I will opt for 'creative ambiguity' if it is genuinely helpful to denuclearization and I will think in a pragmatic way."

He will make his debut by holding talks with Special Envoy to North Korea Bosworth (sic)* who is to visit Korea in a 4-day itinerary from March 7 to 10. Following visits to China and Japan, Bosworth will visit Korea for the first time since he began his term, along with Special Envoy to the Six-Party Talks Sung Kim.

However, concerns are mounting that the status of the Six-Party Talks may be undermined if Bosworth concentrates on improving the U.S.-North Korea ties through bilateral talks. Regarding this, Wi said, "There were many times when the U.S.-North Korea talks spurred improvement of the Six-Party Talks and Bosworth's efforts toward the U.S.-North Korea talks can be viewed positively if they are helpful to the Six-Party Talks." He added, "In principle, what matters most is making headway in the North's denuclearization and improving the current situation."

* (Ed. Note: Bosworth's title is U.S. Special Representative for North Korea Policy (sic)*)

Stephens